Topoi (2010) 29:87–89
DOI 10.1007/s11245-009-9077-0

Introduction

Dale Jacquette

Published online: 9 January 2010

Truth-makers there must be if not all propositions are true—something must make certain of them true, leaving the others as false. Existent states of affairs are the truth-makers of choice for many semantic theorists in philosophy of language. Invoking existent states of affairs as truth-makers in turn involves distinct ontic commitments by virtue of the positive correlation holding between true propositions and the existent states of affairs that they linguistically represent.

The new essays in this issue of *Topoi: An International Review of Philosophy*, all dedicated to the topic, 'Logic, Meaning, and Truth-Making States of Affairs in Philosophical Semantics', shed important light on one of the most elementary components of the theory of meaning by which the truth-values of propositions are established. The authors, recognized authorities in contemporary philosophy of logic and language, discuss the basic principles of truth-maker semantics, the relation of facts to truth, and of ontology more generally to semantics. They consider arguments in support of truth-maker theory, and finally look to criticisms of received truth-maker semantics and in some instances propose additions, refinements, and repairs to bring some version of truth-maker semantics into service despite the weaknesses of naïve formulations. Collectively, the essays in this special issue explain truth-maker theory from friendly and hostile perspectives, and thereby contribute to a technically competent but still accessible philosophical discussion of one of the most important themes in the theoretical interface between metaphysics and philosophical semantics.

D. Jacquette (✉)
Institut für Philosophie, Universität Bern, Unitobler, Länggassstrasse 49a, 3000 Bern, Switzerland
e-mail: dale.jacquette@philo.unibe.ch

I shall say a few words about how and why I decided to organize the essays as I did, and the editorial plan I followed. In the process, I shall introduce the essays and say something about how I see them fitting together to offer an interesting picture of contemporary philosophical thought about the merits and pitfalls of truth-making semantics in logic and philosophy of language. There is not a simple picture to tell, because the field itself is so rich and the philosophical perspectives of the authors are thankfully not always in harmony, and because the authors have not worked in consultation or as the result of participating together at a conference or workshop on the subject. Authors were encouraged to write on any chosen aspect of truth-making semantics for this issue, so that the selection brings together here a true sampling of current philosophical argument about the nature of meaning, truth, and their relation to truth-making states of affairs. The topic gains part of its interest from the fact that it proposes more plausibly than many purely formalist alternatives a direct linkage between a proposition's being true and the prevailing states of affairs by which the world is constituted. The study of truth-makers thus tightly links together logic, philosophical semantics and philosophy of language in general, metaphysics and ontology, and even philosophical psychology and cognitive philosophy or philosophy of mind, philosophy of art and artifacts, along with other philosophical subdisciplines.

The volume opens with Richard Fumerton's essay, 'Partnership in Truth-Making'. Fumerton emphasizes a semantic reciprocity between true propositions and truth-makers. He describes one extremely interesting way in which truth-makers could contribute to an integrated logical-metaphysical theory of meaning. As part of his explanation of the truth-making relationship between true propositions and their truth-makers, Fumerton criticizes

several arguments against facts as key relata in truth-making relations, before proceeding to the provocative thesis that subjective thought has a role not only in experiencing and expressing, but in 'creating', truth.

William G. Lycan, in 'Direct Arguments for the Truth-Condition Theory of Meaning', then invites us to consider his defense of two deductive arguments for a version of truth-making that he calls the truth-condition theory of meaning. The arguments are attention-worthy because they advance specific reasons for accepting truth-condition theory that go beyond and are independent of the theory's explanatory advantages over its competitors in semantic philosophy. Lycan considers criticisms of the two arguments, but ultimately concludes that they offer a sound justification for upholding the truth of the truth-condition theory. We thereby obtain in these first two essays a vivid and compelling picture, first, in Fumerton's essay, of what a kind of truth-makers theory could accomplish, followed in Lycan's discussion by a critical consideration of powerful arguments in support of another version of the theory.

Gerald Vision's essay, 'Intensional Specifications of Truth-Conditions: "Because", "In Virtue Of", and "Made True By…"', argues that a deflationist theory of truth, according to which the proposition that *p* is true if and only if *p*, is inadequate because it fails to do justice as Vision believes it must to the transformations of the original formula to such variations as: the proposition that *p* is true *because p*, the proposition that *p* is true *in virtue of p*, and the proposition that *p* is *made true* by *p*. Vision evaluates the most hopeful deflationist responses to the objection, but believes he has refuted them and on those grounds concludes more generally against the prospects of a deflationist theory of truth. Whether the criticism takes in all truth-maker theories is not immediately clear, although Vision's analysis impressively cuts the ground out from under the most formalistic theories. A deflationist theory in Vision's exact sense and truth-maker theory less formalistically expressed must also minimally explicitly relate positive truths or true affirmative propositions to existent states of affairs. When this move is made, it is also natural to propose that a proposition is made true because or by virtue of the existence in each case of a corresponding state of affairs. This will be the state of affairs intended by the thinker of the proposition under specific conditions of use, by which propositions that express the existence of just those states of affairs that are made true by their existence and are otherwise made false. Vision's essay offers another contrary dialectical perspective, causing us to question the rightness of some type of truth-maker theory, and thereby complementing its prior interpretation and defense.

Questions of fine-grained meaning among extensionally equivalent propositions are examined by Paul Saka, in his essay, 'Rarely Pure and Never Simple: Tensions in the Theory of Truth'. Saka considers the sentence, 'The Matterhorn is 4,500 m high', as expressing a different *truth* than the extensionally equivalent sentence, 'The Matterhorn is 14763.7795276 feet high'. If this is right, then intensionalism in some form seems to be not only favored but absolutely required in a complete and correct philosophical semantics. An intensional theory of meaning supports a purely extensional logic with only a proper fraction of its semantic resources, while at the same time making very explicit the exact expressive limitations of a classical purely extensional logic and philosophical semantics. Saka's investigation nevertheless leaves open the question whether the two sentences do in fact express the same truth, albeit in different ways. Must we conclude the same for meaning-equivalent sentences in different colloquial or formal symbolic languages? There is an intriguing string of further questions to be explored that are hinted at by Saka's essay, including, most prominently perhaps, the challenge of providing adequate identity and individuation conditions for truths. If truths are true sentences, then Saka's Matterhorn sentences are evidently different; if truths are true propositions represented by sentences in different languages, including the mathematical languages of measurement in meters versus feet, then the implications for semantic philosophy are evidently quite different.

The next three essays are organized around a central theme. This concerns the adequacy or inadequacy within truth-maker theory of existent states of affairs as the truth-makers of true positive assertions of fact. Michael Pendelbury, in 'Facts and Truth-making', responds to criticisms of a previously published treatment of truth-maker semantics that has come under fire. After more than 23 years, Pendelbury continues to oppose general and negative facts, offering what he advances as a strengthened rationale for their dispensability. He denies that truth-makers must be entities, and he maintains ecumenically that truth-makers can include anti-realistic as well as realistic truths.

George Englebretsen, in his contribution, 'Making Sense of Truth-Makers', following after but without mentioning Pendelbury, takes up the contrary position. Englebretsen argues that propositions are made true by positive or negative facts, which he also refers to in corresponding appropriately metaphysical categories as presences and absences. He denies that truth-making facts are *in* the world, but prefers to construe them as constitutive properties *of* the world. Thus, Englebretsen is paired with Pendelbury as defending diametrically opposed conceptions of truth-makers with respect to the question of whether positive facts are sufficient for all truth-making, or whether negative facts as the nonexistence of corresponding positive facts must also be brought into an adequate truth-maker theory of meaning.

The present editor, in his essay, 'Truth Breakers', argues that negative states of affairs, the nonexistence of corresponding positive states of affairs, are indispensable for full semantic complementarity in a complete and correct semantic theory of truth-makers and truth-breakers. Jacquette remarks a reductive asymmetry between truth-makers and truth-breakers, by which iterated negative states of affairs can be reduced to positive states of affairs, but positive states of affairs, iterated or not, cannot be reduced to negative states of affairs. Negative states of affairs in philosophical semantics are in turn related in Jacquette's applications of this logical-semantic distinction to such reported phenomena as presence in absence, the metaphysics of gaps, holes, and interstitial, and the conceivability of an existent but totally null universe devoid of any positive states of affairs.

Ernie Lepore and Matthew Stone conclude the volume with a sustained critique of metaphorical meaning and truth. Metaphors, according to Lepore and Stone's proposed reduction, can 'issue' in distinctive cognitive and discursive effects, but, if Lepore and Stone are right, they do so in a way that can adequately be explained externalistically as a causal phenomenon, rather than by appeal to a semantics that recognizes the possibility of communicating metaphorical meaning and metaphorical truth as categories distinct from literal meaning and literal truth.